Advocates push for tough cap on oil, gas emissions

The Toronto Star

October 21, 2022 Friday

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Section: BUSINESS; Pg. B1-B3

Length: 438 words

Byline: Amanda Stephenson The Canadian Press

Body

As environmental groups urge the federal government to move quickly with an aggressive cap on emissions from the country's oil and gas sector, the industry itself says such a move could actually slow down the sector's own decarbonization efforts.

With world leaders preparing to head to Egypt next month for the 27th United Nations climate conference, environmentalists say now is the time for the Trudeau government to announce the specific targets it plans to impose on the oil and gas sector in order to ensure Canada meets its climate commitments.

"We know that time is of the essence with this policy," said Aly Hyder Ali of Environmental Defence, during a virtual news conference Thursday organized by Climate Action Network. "We are seeing the oil and gas industry and its lobbyists hard at work to weaken and delay this policy before it is even implemented."

The federal government indicated earlier this year it would impose a cap on greenhouse gas emissions from the oil and gas sector in order to enable Canada to meet its 2030 emissions reduction target.

While the government has not yet indicated what the allowable level of emissions will be, Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault said recently the cap will be announced in "a matter of months."

Some environmentalists say the oil and gas sector - which is the country's largest producer of greenhouse gases, producing 26 per cent of total emissions - should be pushed to reduce its emissions by a whopping 60 per cent by 2030, in order to keep global temperatures from rising more than 1.5 C and ensure the burden of decarbonization is spread equally among different sectors.

For its own part, the federal government has previously stated it believes Canada's oilpatch is capable of reducing emissions by 31 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030, or 42 per cent below 2019 levels.

That would bring total emissions from the sector - including production, refining and transportation via pipelines - to 110 million tonnes per year by 2030, down from 191 million tonnes in 2019. They haven't been that low in more than three decades.

Oilsands industry leaders have suggested meeting such an ambitious target in a relatively short time frame is likely unachievable. Instead, they have set their own targets through the Pathways Alliance, pledging to reduce oilsands production emissions by 22 million tonnes by 2030. That would represent an approximate 30 per cent reduction from current levels.

Pathways companies have proposed spending $16.5 billion before 2030 on the first stage of a massive proposed carbon capture and storage facility near Cold Lake, Alta.

The Canadian Press

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Journal Code: TTA

Subject: ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES (92%); CLIMATE ACTION (90%); EMISSIONS (90%); ENERGY & UTILITY REGULATION & POLICY (90%); ENVIRONMENTAL & WILDLIFE ORGANIZATIONS (90%); GOVERNMENT & PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (90%); GREENHOUSE GASES (90%); OIL & GAS REGULATION & POLICY (90%); POLLUTION MONITORING, PREVENTION & REMEDIATION (89%); AIR QUALITY REGULATION (78%); CARBON NEUTRAL INITIATIVES (78%); CLIMATE CHANGE (78%); ENVIRONMENTAL DEPARTMENTS (78%); ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION & POLICY (78%); ENVIRONMENTALISM (78%); GLOBAL WARMING (78%); LOBBYING (78%); PRESS CONFERENCES (76%); CARBON CAPTURE & STORAGE (73%); GOVERNMENT ADVISORS & MINISTERS (73%); CONFERENCES & CONVENTIONS (71%); UNITED NATIONS (56%)

Industry: OIL & GAS INDUSTRY (93%); EMISSIONS (90%); ENERGY & UTILITY REGULATION & POLICY (90%); OIL & GAS REGULATION & POLICY (90%); OIL & GAS PIPELINES (89%); OIL SANDS (89%); CARBON NEUTRAL INITIATIVES (78%); GLOBAL WARMING (78%); OIL EXTRACTION (73%); PRESS AGENCY RELEASES (71%)

Geographic: CANADA (94%); EGYPT (79%)

Load-Date: October 21, 2022

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